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ACCESS TO FOOD:
FROM RHETORIC TO
ACTION



Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth
Department of Public Health Services

Access to Food From Rhetoric to Action

To improve health status of the citizens in this community the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth has made a commitment to "support the Department of Public Health Services and other community agencies in their efforts to ensure an accessible, affordable, nutritious and personally acceptable supply of safe food and safe drinking water for everyone" (Implementation Vision 2020, Directions for Creating a Sustainable Region, January 1993).

Let's take action to ensure that everyone in our community has access to food now.

Why?

- In the present economic times many individuals and families cannot obtain the food they need. They are faced with chronic food deprivation. The emergency food providers are burdened with the increased demand for food. These agencies were set up to address emergency needs, not the needs of those chronically deprived.
- Food is necessary to achieve and maintain personal health and well being.
- The psychological effects of lack of food are harsh. They include feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, frustration and hopelessness. Such feelings present a social cost to our community.
- Access to adequate food is essential to provide the energy and freedom needed to move beyond attending to survival tasks, thereby permitting an opportunity to care for others, to pursue aspirations and to feel useful and significant.

A Call for Action

Everyone can get involved in implementing and supporting access to food activities. No single activity will answer the diverse needs of all people with food access problems. A number of activities are necessary. One or more of the following may interest you.

Cooperatives

Organized food purchasing and distribution system that operates under a board of directors selected from the membership. Members can purchase from the co-op at preferred prices. Dividends earned by the co-op are distributed to members based on the dollar value of goods purchased. Generally co-ops have some paid workers.

Action:

- Do the research on how to start a co-op. Notify those around you to assess the level of interest. Help with planning and setting up the structure. Pledge some volunteer time to support the operation.

Information sources: Canadian Cooperative Association Resource Centre, 252 Bloor Street W., Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6.

School student nourishment programs

Possibilities range from simple daily snacks to several full meals served daily. They can be offered from the school site or from an off-site location eg. a church.

Action:

- Volunteer to assist in the planning and operation of a nourishment program in your neighbourhood school.
- Lobby for development and implementation of comprehensive school food policies.

Information sources: Local school parents' group, principal, other school staff; Department of Public Health Services.

Shoppers' alert

A group regularly scans food prices and pools information on the best buys. They shop individually or in groups and may provide transportation if required.

Action:

- Volunteer to scan one or more flyers or newspapers regularly. Organize the findings to minimize the work and time involved in shopping.

Information sources: Local newspapers and food advertisement flyers.

Community kitchens

Money is pooled to buy groceries. Members take turns cooking for the whole group. Meals are taken home to feed a family or eaten at the Community Kitchen. They may have 35 to 40 members or more.

Action:

- Start a community kitchen if there is an available kitchen with adequate facilities for quantity food preparation (eg. community centre or church kitchen), and a population to support the operation.
- Start a cooking equipment library for community kitchen members.
- Start a regular meal program for seniors or people with disabilities.
- Support local charities which fund community kitchens, offer your time or money.

Information sources: Department of Public Health Services.

Collective kitchens

Participants prepare meals for up to 12 people at each cooking session. Meals are eaten at home. They have 3 to 5 members per group. A variation of this theme is a dining club - food is prepared and served, the cost is shared. There could be easily 8 to 10 people in a dining club.

Action:

- Support local charities which fund collective kitchens i.e. The United Way and The Hamilton Foundation. Offer your time or money.
- Canvass your friends to find out if a few people are interested in starting a collective kitchen.

Information sources: "Cookery" Section of all public library branches in the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth; Department of Public Health Services.

Food management classes

Instruction programs in fundamental living skills related to food eg. meal planning, shopping and preparation. There are many members of our community who have not had the benefit of learning these skills at home or at school.

Action:

- Examine the possibility of providing this programming in a local school, church or community centre.

Information sources: Department of Public Health Services.

Food buying clubs

Friends and neighbours pool money to purchase food directly from a distributor. The food is then divided among purchasers. Everyone shares the work and the responsibility.

Action:

- Check your public library for information on how to start a buying club in your neighbourhood.

Information sources: Canadian Cooperative Association Resource Centre; Department of Public Health Services.

Surplus food projects

Large food service operations like hospitals, banquet halls, convention centres, and markets send surplus food to local community centres to provide meals for people. Large food service operations may prepare and freeze food for use at local community centres

Action:

- Volunteer to help one of the missions.
- Investigate the feasibility of starting a prepared and perishable food project. This will require preliminary planning and contact with Public Health Inspection Services, 546-3570, before starting the project.

Information sources: The mission you would like to help, the manager of the kitchen at the potential food source; Department of Public Health Services.

Garden Share projects

Harvest from garden(s) is shared. Projects could include grow-a-row, field-to-table, pick-your-own expeditions, bulk buying from producers, and cooperative canning, freezing and pickling.

Action:

- Arrange a trip to a local pick-your-own farm for the people you know. Supporting local businesses helps keep them viable. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food office can supply you with a listing of some of the farmers who would welcome your group.
- The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food will also be able to supply you with reliable recipes and information on methods for canning, freezing and pickling foods.

Information sources: Royal Botanical Gardens Teaching Garden; local gardening clubs; "Gardening" and "Cookery" Sections of all public libraries in the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth; Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food Information Centre - call 1-800-567-8898.

Food transportation programs

Activities to transport people to food or food to people.

Action:

- Volunteer to assist in a Meals-on-Wheels or Wheels-to-Meals program.
- Find out if your community has transportation to grocery stores if needed, and/or if grocery delivery services are meeting the community's needs. Work on establishing these services if people need them.
- Start a Community Market. These are small fruit and vegetable markets set up in the lobby or recreation room of a building.

Information sources: VON of Hamilton-Wentworth Meals-on-Wheels program, phone 522-1022; Community Markets information - Greater Hamilton Food Share, 529-3881; or Department of Public Health Services.

Food banks

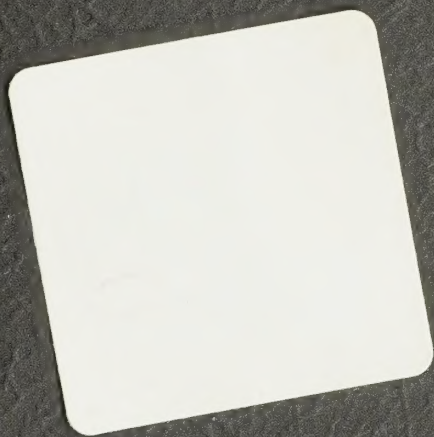
People can obtain food from a community cupboard, for emergency use.

Action:

- Volunteer to help with food drives, fundraising, shelving goods, serving clients, or record keeping.

Information sources: The mission you would like to help; Greater Hamilton Food Share.

For more information on any of these activities call Nutrition Services at 546-3520.



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